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California Postsecondary Education Commission

# The Improving Teacher Quality (ITQ) State Grants Program: 2006 Activities

*This report reviews the status of current projects in the Improving Teacher Quality State Grants Program. It also updates the Commission on the two new Master Grants for Retention of Science and Mathematics Teachers and describes plans for a research symposium that the program plans to co-sponsor in early 2007.*

## Contents

Introduction.....	1
Teacher Retention Initiative.....	1
2005 Academic Literacy Grants .....	2
Research Symposium on Evaluation Research.....	3
Next Steps.....	4

The Commission advises the Governor and Legislature on higher education policy and fiscal issues. Its primary focus is to ensure that the state's educational resources are used effectively to provide Californians with postsecondary education opportunities. More information about the Commission is available at [www.cpec.ca.gov](http://www.cpec.ca.gov).

Draft Commission Report

## Introduction

The Improving Teacher Quality State Grants Program, which the California Postsecondary Education Commission (CPEC) administers under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, is now fully in place. All projects currently operating are following the guidelines of NCLB, which has placed a greater focus on the role of scientifically based research in improving teacher quality. NCLB also broadens the partnerships required of applicants to include both subject matter and education faculty from institutions of higher education (prior partnerships required only one or the other). This report details current activities, including the start-up of projects funded in late 2005, the 2006 Request for Proposals process, and plans for a research symposium in early 2007.

## Teacher Retention Initiative

The major program activity this year was a competition for two large master grants targeting the retention of mathematics and science teachers. The Request for Proposals (RFP), released last spring, invited university-based consortia of professional development projects to compete for funding. The successful proposers are expected to hold a competition to award and operate approximately ten subgrants serving current mathematics or science teachers.

The primary reason for undertaking this grant project is to build on the state's efforts to recruit and train new science and mathematics teachers at the California State University and University of California. With at least one out of four science or math teachers leaving the classroom within five years of entering teaching, it is critical to not just recruit

and train more teachers but to retain the experienced cadre already in the classroom. Specific targets for the subgrants will be teachers who have completed their induction period but who are still new to the profession; teachers who have not yet met the “highly qualified” requirements of NCLB; and teachers in high-need schools. In addition to providing professional development, the projects must also conduct evaluation research to demonstrate how the activities contribute to teacher retention and, if possible, to student achievement.

Following the release of the RFP, the Commission received one application for each of the master grants—a math submission from the California Mathematics Project and a science submission from the California Science Project, both based at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). Both are part of the California Subject Matter Projects, a long-standing consortium of projects located primarily on University of California and California State University campuses. The proposals were reviewed by panels of experts and by CPEC staff and were recommended for funding. Each will be funded for five years: the math project for a total of \$5,243,182; the science project for a total of \$5,241,000. Each master grantee will conduct a competition and award ten subgrants to project sites throughout California. In both cases, the professional development activities will be provided primarily in the first three years of the project, but will continue into the fourth year on a reduced basis. The final year of the project will be solely for the purpose of compiling all research results and providing dissemination of those results to the grant partners and to state and national organizations. Each master grant will receive approximately \$1.5 million each year for the first three years, \$500,000 in the fourth year and \$250,000 in the fifth year.

The ten subgrants in the mathematics project will ultimately serve 470 teachers with intensive professional development, as well as 150 teachers in a final-year teacher retention conference. More than half the teachers will be served through a variety of activities—institutes and workshops, coaching and mentoring, Lesson Study groups, data driven reflection, and leadership development—over a three-year period; they will constitute the cohort for longitudinal research on the effects of the professional development. In each of the last two years, 100 additional teachers will be enlisted to participate in various activities led by members of the original cohort or generated by their ongoing leadership at school sites. In the last year, the National Teacher Retention Conference will provide opportunities for sharing of research results and professional development models with additional teachers. More than 171,000 students are expected to benefit from the involvement of their teachers in the project over its lifespan.

The science project will also fund ten subgrants, and will engage entire middle and high school science departments in professional development activities, including content institutes, structured mentoring programs, participation in Lesson Study, and literacy and English Learner workshops. A primary cohort of 30 teachers per site will be recruited from science departments in linked, high poverty middle and high schools, with each subgrant providing services to the same 30 teachers for a three-year period. In addition, each site will recruit an additional 30 teachers per year from other high poverty schools who will participate in selected activities for one year. The evaluation research will be based on the primary teacher cohort. A total of 1200 teachers will be served; more than 236,000 students will benefit over the life of the grant. The grantee also plans to sponsor periodic regional conferences on “Science and Literacy” and on “English Learners and Science” that will leverage project funds for a broader impact on teaching quality in the areas served.

The evaluation research conducted by each project is somewhat differently structured, but both hope to show what kinds of professional development are most effective in retaining teachers, and how those results may vary among different groups of teachers who may be prone to leaving the profession. The projects will also examine the effects on student achievement and try to identify professional development models that support both teacher retention and student improvement. These grants will also help support collaboration among the state’s two largest public university systems. They are strongly sup-

ported by both the University of California Office of the President and the Chancellor's Office of the California State University, and efforts will be made by both systems to encourage coordination and collaboration with their teacher recruitment projects.

## **2005 Academic Literacy Grants**

This summer marked the formal beginning of professional development activities for grants awarded in 2005 to help improve academic literacy for students in secondary schools. The Commission funded eight projects at approximately \$1 million each to provide three years of professional development and a fourth year to conclude evaluation research. The projects are located throughout the state, with three projects in northern California and five in Southern California. All of the projects are well underway, with most of them conducting intensive summer institutes for teachers in their targeted schools. Photos of some of the summer institute activities will be presented at the Commission meeting.

These projects cover a wide array of content areas, including math, science, English language arts, history, and other core subjects. The focus of the first training is to help the teachers better understand what academic literacy is, why it is important for student achievement, and how teachers can incorporate strategies to improve student academic literacy into subject matter instruction. Teachers are learning how enhancement of reading, writing, and speaking skills improves subject matter learning as well. Depending on the particular professional development model employed, the summer institutes include lectures and presentations, small group discussions and experiments, collaborative lesson planning, teaching and evaluation of outcomes, and other activities.

The projects are also moving forward with the implementation of their evaluation research component, especially on student achievement. As is usual in the first year of projects, all are working through some unforeseen issues including school district changes, recruiting challenges, and staff shifts. All projects appear to be off to a good start, and the enthusiasm of the teacher participants is evident. Teachers especially appreciated the direct connection between academic literacy and their particular content area, and felt they would be able to implement new strategies in their classrooms.

## **Research Symposium on Evaluation Research**

The increased focus on scientifically based research that CPEC has incorporated in its administration of the Improving Teacher Quality Program has raised awareness of its importance. Previously, projects evaluated their own efforts, mainly to determine if they had carried out what they had promised and whether teachers believed the training could change their classroom practice. NCLB reflects a culture shift in national education policy toward a focus on results rather than on process—on outcomes rather than inputs. Projects are not only expected to use existing scientifically-based research to support the design of their proposals, they are also expected to help contribute to the knowledge base of what actually supports student achievement. This expanded “evaluation research” is being conducted by all of the currently-funded projects.

The challenges to practitioners are many and varied. In the past, there has been little systematic connection or communication among those who provide professional development (practitioners), the research community, and policymakers who require and/or rely on research to help them make decisions about programs and policies that guide education. With a growing cadre of practitioners now involved in research, the ITQ program is ideally placed to help facilitate discourse among these stakeholders regarding what quality research on teacher professional development consists of, and how it can be expanded and used to continuously improve teacher practice and student achievement.

The Commission is collaborating with the California Department of Education and other agencies and organizations to sponsor a research symposium in February 2007. The purpose is to bring together practitioners, researchers, and policymakers to discuss how to conduct and utilize quality professional development research. The invitational day-and-a-half session will take place at the Clark Kerr Conference Center at the University of California Berkeley.

### **Next Steps**

Over the next several months, the ITQ staff will continue to conduct site visits and work with the new grantees in the science and math teacher retention projects to assist them in moving their projects forward. In addition, the ITQ Assessment and Dissemination Team will be working with the Academic Literacy Grants to assist them in working through their first year to ensure the success of current literacy grants. Finally, ITQ staff will begin to plan for a new round of funding in 2007, seeking to identify new issues in teacher professional development that may benefit from a targeted effort under the NCLB program.